

## Open Space and Recreation

The open space and outdoor recreation opportunities are one of Leelanau Township’s defining features. In addition to the Township owned and operated recreation facilities, there is a State Park and five conservancy lands located within Township borders. The wealth and quality of these areas are a substantial natural and cultural asset to the community and greatly contribute to the quality of life for residents and visitors.

### Township Recreational Facilities

The Township currently owns 285 acres of property, spanning six parks, which are used for recreation. Along with Township-owned parks, there are a number of water access points along the Lake Michigan shoreline that are used for recreational access. In 2022, Leelanau Township adopted a Parks and Recreation Master Plan which renewed eligibility for recreation funding from the State of Michigan. The table titled “Leelanau Township Recreational Facilities” outlines the facilities under park ownership. A more detailed discussion of each park can be found in the most recent Parks and Recreation Master Plan.<sup>1</sup>

Table XX: Leelanau Township Recreational Facilities

Facility	Description	Size	Accessibility Rating (1 – 5)
Braman Hill Recreation Area	The Park includes sport courts for tennis, pickleball and basketball. The Park also includes some skatepark equipment.	65.8 acres	3
Peterson Park	Peterson Park is located on a high bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. The Park offers a stairway to the beach area on the water for shoreline recreation.	11.7 acres	2
Buster Dame Park	This neighborhood park was once developed as the premier baseball complex. The park now has two new pickleball courts.	3.2 acres	3
Omena Beach Park	Omena Beach Park offers 100 feet of public access to Lake Michigan. The Park is conveniently located a block off of M-22.	0.46 acres	1
Christmas Cove Beach	Christmas Cove Beach is a popular swimming destination in the northwest portion of the Township with 400 feet of Lake Michigan frontage.	1.7 acres	1
Woolsey Airfield	Woolsey Airfield Park is located north of the Village of Northport. The small and rural nature of the airport mean that it is only used by private aircrafts.	202.46 acres	1

<sup>1</sup> INSERT LINK TO PLAN WHEN IT IS ADOPTED

Like a Community Master Plan, a Parks and Recreation Master Plan has an implementation table to achieve the Parks and Recreation goals of the community. The table below is the implementation table from the Parks and Recreation Master Plan adopted in 2022.

Table XX: Parks and Recreation Action Plan

<b>Year</b>	<b>Facility</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Funding Sources</b>
2022	Braman Hill	Skate Park, biking and pickleball improvements	MDNR Grants
2022	Park System	Develop base and survey information into presentation boards.	Township
2022	Omena Beach	Install a mobi mat to the beach to allow people of all abilities to enter the water.	MDNR Grants
2022	Omena Beach	Improvements to parking area.	MDNR Grants
2022	Omena Beach	Design and implement beach improvements and address erosion issues.	MDNR Grants, CMP
2022	Peterson Park	Design and develop a site master plan. Traffic pattern study on Foxview Road to park entrance.	Road Commission, Township
2022	Buster Dame	Add shade options and water for the dog park.	Fundraising
2022	Buster Dame	Add windscreens for the pickleball courts.	Fundraising
2022	Omena Beach	Playground and safety surfacing improvements.	MDNR Grants
2022	Christmas Cove	Design and implement beach improvements and address erosion issues.	MDNR Grants, CMP
2022, 2023	Signage	Improve park and wayfinding signage throughout park system.	Township
2023	Peterson Park	Improve roadways, parking and accessibility.	MDNR Grants
2023	Peterson Park	Playground and safety surfacing improvements.	MDNR Grants
2023	Buster Dame	Design and develop a site master plan.	Township
2023	Christmas Cove	Design and develop a site master plan.	Township
2023	Woolsey Airfield	Design and develop a site master plan.	Township
2024	Braman Hill	Accessibility improvements to upper area and shooting range.	MDNR Grants
2024	Peterson Park	Design and implement a new park entrance and driveway to improve safety.	MDNR Grants
2024	Buster Dame	Design parking to accommodate facilities.	Township
2024	Christmas Cove	Design accessibility improvements to gain access to the water.	MDNR Grants
2024	Woolsey Airfield	Install an accessible canoe/kayak launch on Mud Lake.	MDNR Grants
2024	Woolsey Airfield	Install a viewing platform over Mud Lake.	MDNR Grants
2025	Braman Hill	Add picnic facilities and site furnishings.	MDNR Grants
2025	Peterson Park	Design and develop a new overlook deck on the southwest corner of the park.	MDNR Grants
2026	Braman Hill	Improve roadways, parking and entrance drive.	MDNR Grants
2026	Woolsey Airfield	Park improvements to include event space, picnic facilities and parking.	MDNR Grants

### Leelanau Conservancy

The Leelanau Conservancy is a non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve the land, water, and scenic character of Leelanau County. Since 1988 the Conservancy has protected over 16,000 acres of land, 53 miles of stream and lake frontage, and 28 miles of trails. Of the 26

Conservancy properties in Leelanau County, five are located in Leelanau Township. As stated in Chapter 4: Natural Resources, Leelanau Township should continue to work with the Leelanau Conservancy to identify properties for preservation and conservation. Additional strategies for land conservation include facilitating voluntary conservation easements between private landholder and the Leelanau Conservancy. Under conservation easements, land is still owned by the original landholder but is restricted from future development. Property owners who enter conservation easements may be eligible for tax deductions.

#### Lighthouse West Natural Area

The Lighthouse West Natural Area is 42 acres of land at the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula. The undeveloped shoreline provide an important habitat for over 100 species of birds. The trail system is 1.2 miles in length and features an 800 ft staircase down a steep bluff to Lake Michigan.<sup>2</sup>

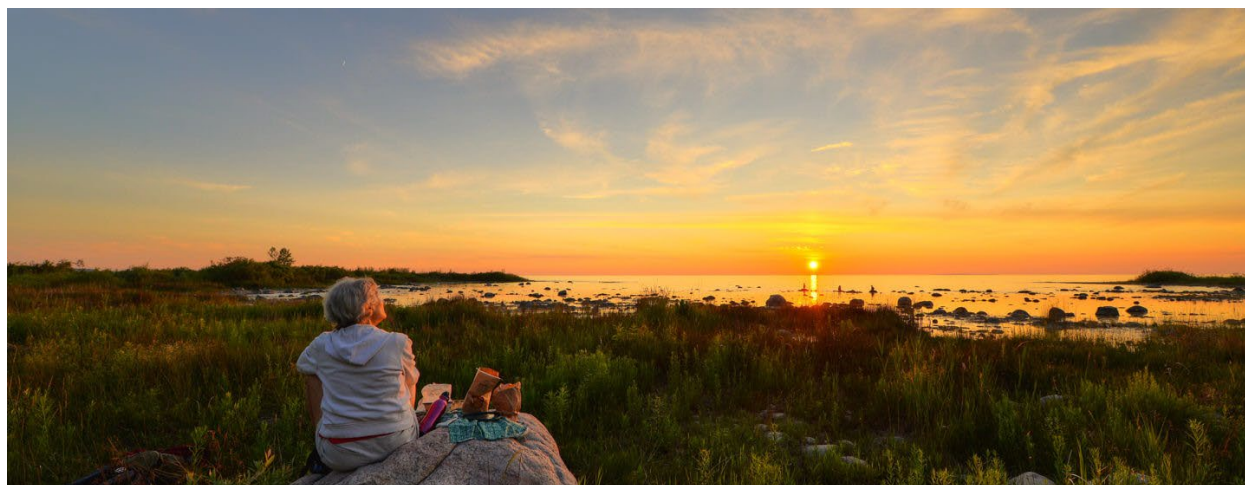


Figure XX: Lighthouse West Natural Area. Credit: Ken Scott

#### Kehl Lake Natural Area

Located between Leelanau State Park and Cathead Bay is the Kehl Lake Natural Area. Three quarters of the shoreline are protected and include wetlands and mixed forests of hemlocks and old-growth white pines. The 2-mile trail network loops along the west side of the lake and traverses through the pristine forests.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Lighthouse West Natural Area", Leelanau Conservancy", <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/lighthouse-west-natural-area/>

<sup>3</sup> "Kehl Lake Natural Area", Leelanau Conservancy, <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/kehl-lake-natural-area/>





Figure XX: Kehl Lake Natural Area. Credit Ken Scott

#### Finton Natural Area

The Finton Natural Area is an important piece of conservation land because it forms a wildlife corridor that stretches from Northport Bay to Cathead Bay. The thick forest is formed a maple and beech trees. The trail system is relatively short, 0.5 miles in total length.<sup>4</sup>

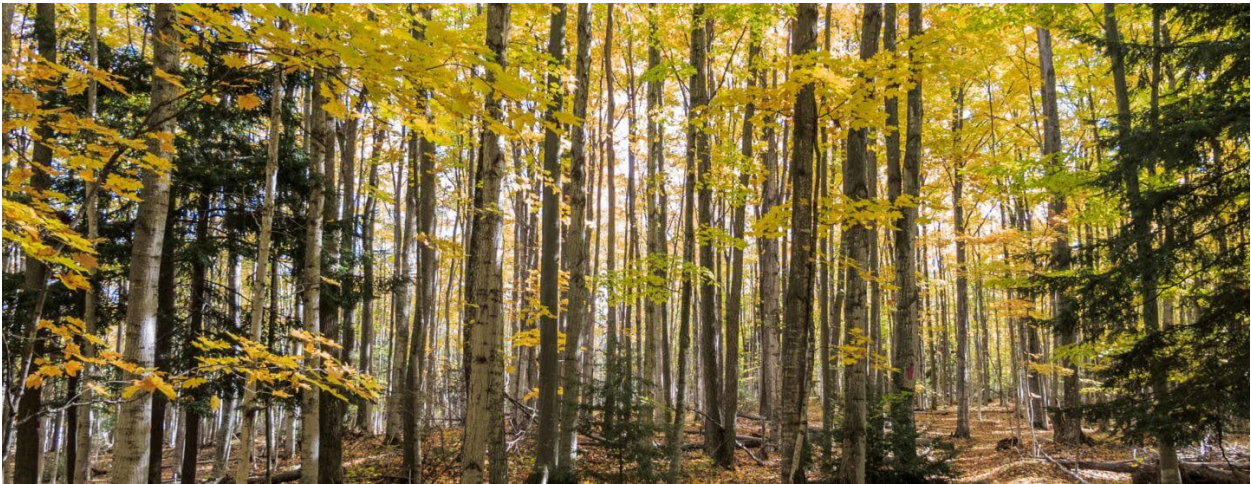


Figure XX: Finton Natural Area. Credit: Ed Ketterer

#### Jeff Lamont Wildlife Preserve

Another piece of the Northport-Cathead Bay wildlife corridor, the Jeff Lamont preserve is 40 acres of forest and wetlands. The trail is 0.2 miles in length and runs through a shady tunnel of trees. In the spring the preserve is dotted with wildflowers and pink lady slippers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Finton Natural Area", Leelanau Conservancy, <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/finton-natural-area/>

<sup>5</sup> "Jeff Lamont Preserve", Leelanau Conservancy, <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/jeff-lamont-preserve/>





Figure XX: Jeff Lamont Wildlife Preserve. Credit: Ken Scott

### Gull Island Preserve

Gull Island, which is located in Northport Bay, is an inaccessible bird sanctuary for herring gulls. Herring gulls mate for life and abandon their nests at the slightest disturbance. In a study from Lake Superior State University, banded gulls returned to the island over 24 years. The island also presents a health and hazard safety for people, the crumbling structures lead to harmful debris and the inhalation of the fungal spore, Histoplasmosis, can cause a potential fatal lung disease.<sup>6</sup>

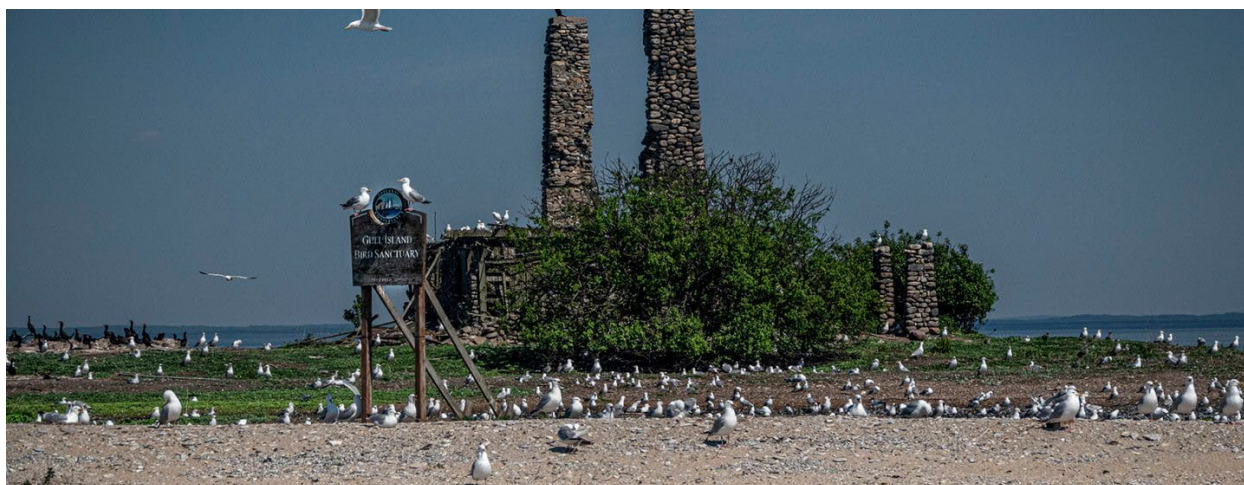


Figure XX: Gull Island Preserve. Credit: Ingrid Lockhart

### Soper Natural Area

The Soper Natural Area is a critical habitat location for the lady slipper flower. Observations in 1995 documented at least 1,000 showy lady slippers but in 2002 only six bloomed. The Conservancy is actively managing this natural area to restore the lady slipper population and during the management period the Soper Natural Area is closed to the public.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Gull Island", Leelanau Conservancy, <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/gull-island-preserve/>

<sup>7</sup> "Soper Natural Area", Leelanau Conservancy, <https://leelanauconservancy.org/naturalarea/soper-preserve/>





Figure XX: Soper Natural Area. Source: Leelanau Conservancy

### Leelanau State Park

The State of Michigan owns and operates the Leelanau State Park which is located at the northern most edge of the Township. The park total 1,550 acres and is split into two sections. The northern most section is home to the Grand Traverse Lighthouse Museum, a rustic campground, mini cabins, playground, and picnic area. The southern section (Cathead Bay) has 8.5 miles of walking and winter recreation trails and a popular beach. In 2018, the park received 279,671 day use visitors and 16,118 campers, roughly a 16% increase from 2017. The most overnight visitors came from the City of Grand Rapids (3%), followed by Traverse City (1%) and Kalamazoo (1%). When



surveyed, visitors to the park stated that the top three activities they participated in were visiting the shoreline (94%), scenic viewing (85%), and visiting the lighthouse (82%). Future MDNR goals for the park include expanded recreational access to Mud Lake, update wayfinding, and small expansion of the campground.<sup>8</sup>

Figure XX: Leelanau State Park at Night. Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

### Land Conservation and Climate Change

Land conservation has two major benefits on reducing the impact and contributions of climate change. First, the land under conservation will never be developed so the emissions that would have been generated from said development will never occur. Second, the natural systems help absorb emissions from atmosphere which get converted into plant material.

#### Actions

- Implement the vision, goals, and actions as specified in the Leelanau Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Continue to work with the Leelanau Conservancy on identifying land for conservation and preservation
- Provide information and education materials to private property owners on conservation easements

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<sup>8</sup> "Leelanau State Park General Management Plan", Michigan Department of Natural Resources, February 2021, <http://bria2.net/mdnr-gmp/wp-content/uploads/LeelanauSPGeneralManagementPlan02-18-2021.pdf>